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Utah  
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| <u>Utah</u><br>Clip | Sunday Business Post {Agenda} | 36,37   | Sun, 10 May 2009 | 2               | 4                |

# Utah's great outdoors

With landscapes that boast titanic columns, ~~cliffs and monoliths~~ and names such as Monument Valley and Angel's Landing, sparsely populated Utah is a wonder of the world, writes **Adrian Weckler**

**W**hen people think of Utah, Mormons come to mind. "Going to get yourself a couple of wives, eh?" is the most common refrain from friends and colleagues when you tell them you're planning to visit the state.

For the record, you can't have two wives in Utah (or anywhere else in the US). But what you will encounter is one of the most stunning landscapes in North America.

Utah has no fewer than five national parks within its boundaries, more than any other US state except Alaska. After a week in the area, it's not hard to see why so much of the land has been designated as an area of extraordinary natural beauty.

Each of the five parks – Zion, Bryce, Canyonlands, Arches and Capitol Reef – combine stunning scenery with amazing outdoor recreational facilities. The best way to describe it is to think of a combination of the Old West and mountainous terrain, with a Grand Canyon thrown in.

There's lots of red rock, some desert, some snowy

peaks and lunar-style canyons.

And the chances are that you will have most of it to yourself. Because Utah, a state the size of Britain, has just three million people living in it. And half of those live around the capital, Salt Lake City. That means you have more chance of running into a bear or a mountain lion than a human being in many areas of the state.

Getting to Utah means flying into Salt Lake City or Las Vegas in bordering Nevada. As a tourist destination, Salt Lake City has a few charms. The nearby Great Salt Lake is a restful place; its extra-salty water means that it is impossible to drown and that no fish survive there. However, brine shrimp are in such abundance in the lake that it provides most of the world's supply of the creatures, commonly used in commercial fish food.

If you want urban sophistication, Salt Lake City does not qualify as a top ten destination in the US. The city, which has a population of about 1.5 million people and is spread out over a 60-mile area, has two main attractions – the Mormon Tabernacle Choir ([www.mormontabernaclechoir.org](http://www.mormontabernaclechoir.org)) and the Family History Library ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)).

Both institutions are run by the Mormon church and the library is one of the most extensive genealogy resources in the world.

Areas around Salt Lake City are famous for skiing. Though most people think of Utah as desert it has some of the best snow in the US and is regularly featured as a top ski destination in the international skiing press.

Nearby Deer Valley (36 miles from Salt Lake) is considered the best resort in the state (if not the lower 48 US states), while Park City and Snowbird are both under 45 minutes drive from the city.

If you're out of season for skiing, it's worth stopping into Robert Redford's Sundance Resort ([www.sundance.org](http://www.sundance.org)). While the filmstar's demesne is famous for its

film festival, it is also a fully functional luxury resort. Of all the places visited in Utah, this had the highest standards of accommodation and cuisine – the food is superb.

But the real action in Utah is in its great outdoors, and the best base to start a scenic park tour is Moab, a small town in the south-east of the state and about five hours' drive from Salt Lake City.

From Moab, Arches National Park and Canyonlands National Park are a short drive (under 50km in each case). Capitol Reef National Park is about a three-hour drive.

The Arches National Park ([www.nps.gov/arch](http://www.nps.gov/arch)) gives Utah one of its most famous icons, the amazing Delicate Arch.

This is one of 2,000 sandstone arches in the area that have been naturally formed through erosion. There are also numerous examples of seemingly-impossible balancing acts involving large boulders on skinny rock columns. Arches is one of the state's busiest and most popular park areas, mainly due to its close proximity to Moab.

Next to Arches is Canyonlands National Park ([www.nps.gov/cany](http://www.nps.gov/cany)). This is less busy, but no less grand a landscape. It closely resembles the Grand Canyon, with dramatic valleys, canyons and eroded plateaux. Because of this, it is hard terrain to access.

There are a few roads through the park, but one of them crosses an area called Island In The Sky. The reason for its name is soon obvious: the road falls off on either side to canyons several hundred feet below. It is a very

dramatic demesne, but probably one best appreciated by a helicopter trip.

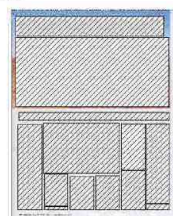
Moving inland towards central southern Utah, Capitol Reef National Park ([www.nps.gov/care](http://www.nps.gov/care)) might be worth stopping in.

This is one of the most interesting geological areas in Utah. It has a 100-mile 'fold', which means that a large amount of rock buckled into a mountain range about 65 million years ago. This fold, called the Waterpocket Fold, is mostly hikeable. Along the way are columns, spires, cliffs and monoliths.

However, for an itinerary of a week, it might be one destination too much. If you do visit the area, there is a large range of accommodation available in Torrey, the closest town to the park. We stayed in the Sandstone Inn ([capitolreefwonderland.com](http://capitolreefwonderland.com)).

Moving south, you enter an area that is arguably more awe-inspiring than any of the national parks: Monument Valley. This is the famous desert landscape used in many of John Ford and John Wayne's western movies. It is a huge demesne that crosses from southern Utah into Arizona and deep into Navajo Indian territory. Enormous solitary plateaux – called Mesa – punctuate its skyline. It is a perfect wild west scene.

There are two places to stay in or around the Valley. The first is Gouldings Lodge ([www.gouldings.com](http://www.gouldings.com)), the hotel where Ford and Wayne stayed when they shot their



films. The second, just-opened, place is the View Hotel ([www.monumentvalley-view.com](http://www.monumentvalley-view.com)). We stayed in Gouldings Lodge, and while the food and decor is basic,

the views from each room are breathtaking and make it a must-see.

Whereas Monument Valley is awe-inspiring and humbling, Bryce Canyon – which is a three hour drive west of the Valley – is arguably the most dramatic of Utah's park landscapes. This park ([www.nps.gov/brca](http://www.nps.gov/brca)) has a bizarre set of teetering columns which can be hiked through, combining forest, streams and mountains. It is also one of the most famous mountain-biking areas in the US.

We stayed in the four-star Best Western hotel in the nearby town of Ruby's Inn

([www.rubysinn.com](http://www.rubysinn.com)).

Further west from Bryce Canyon is Zion National Park ([www.nps.gov/zion](http://www.nps.gov/zion)). Of all of the national parks in Utah, Zion is the most accessible and the most friendly for families and novice hikers. It is less than two hours' drive from Las Vegas in bordering Nevada, putting it within easy reach for international travellers.

The park itself is an Alpine oasis. Different in character from the arid desert of the surrounding countryside, it blooms with flowers, trees and lush mountainous vegetation. You could relax here for a few hours, but a hike up to Angel's Landing is recommended.

The two-hour (each way) hike is quite steep and involves holding on to chains for safety at several points. But for dramatic views and a sense of accomplishment, it is well worth doing. If this seems a little ambitious, the gentler Emerald Pools,

Weeping Rock or Riverside Walk hikes are also gorgeous. There is ample accommodation in the area, including the Cable Lodge Inn ([cablelodgeinn.com](http://cablelodgeinn.com)), where we stayed.

In between the national parks, a number of side-attractions are worth a look. Aside from its Mormonism and national parks, Utah is famous for its dinosaur fossils.

Together with New Mexico, Utah is the single biggest source of dinosaur bones in the world. At any one time, there are several important excavations under way.

The results – including full-scale reproductions of Jurassic era dinosaurs – can be seen in many museums across the state.

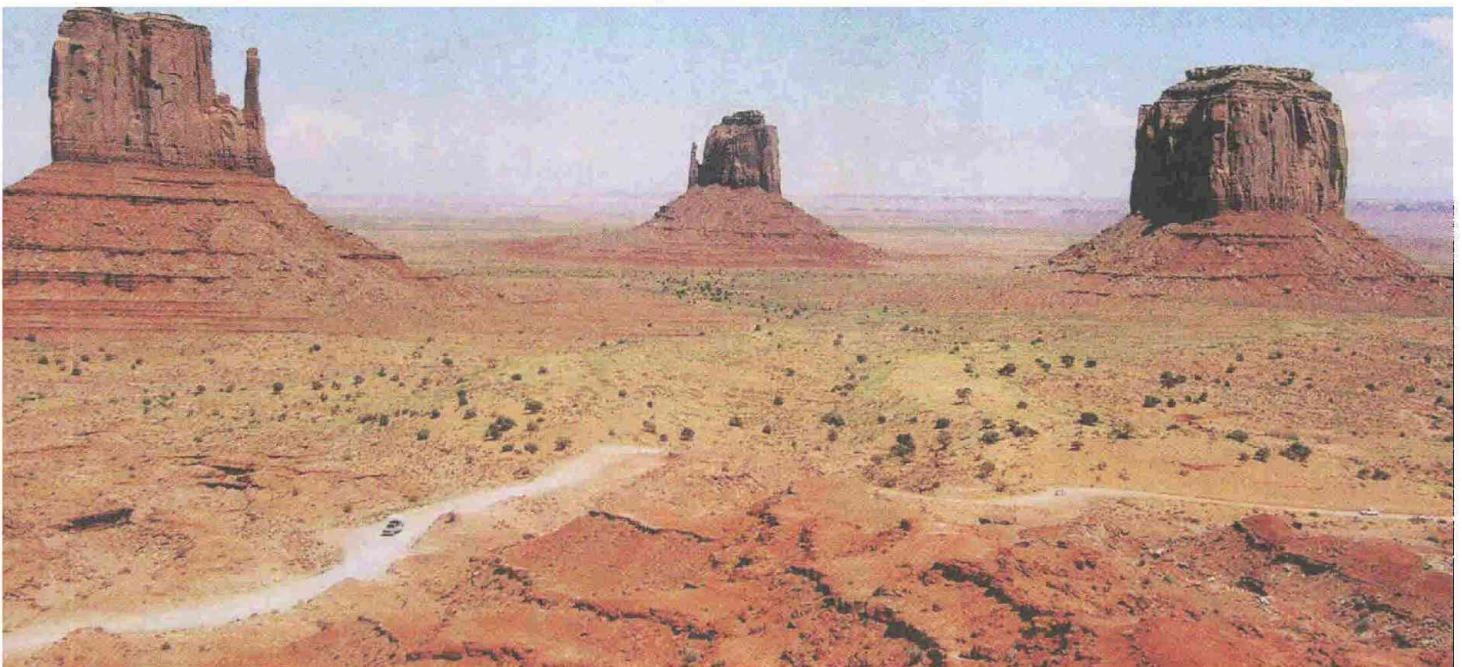
There is also a state park dedicated to dinosaurs in the extreme north-east of the state, bordering Colorado. However, this is not close to any other significant attrac-

tions.

Utah also has a large number of working ranches. These are worked by genuine cowboys, keeping track of steer, bison and other livestock on horseback. We stopped at one ranch where we chatted to Beezey, a working cowboy. He told us that much of Utah was still an agricultural area.

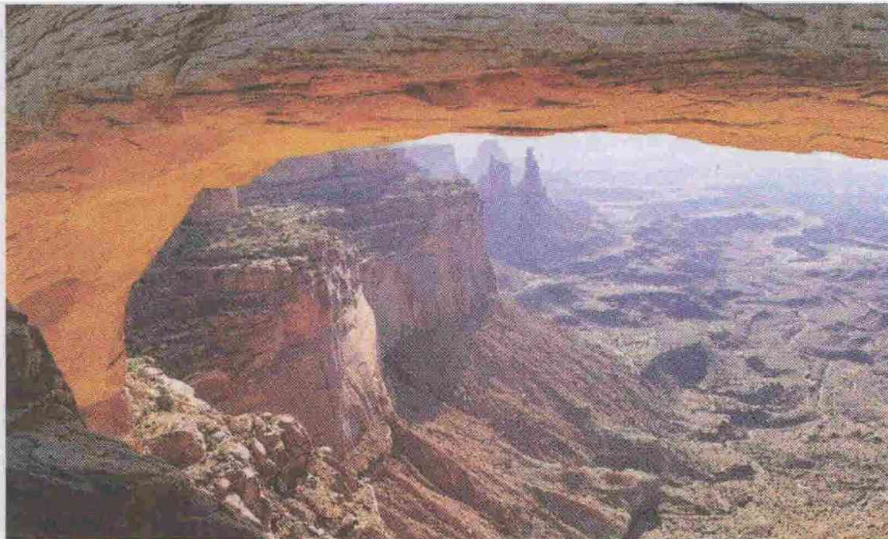
Utah is a wonderland for outdoors enthusiasts. It is a shame that it is so far away, in relative terms.

But if you have the time and want to see a part of the world that few Irish people ever see, except as a backdrop in westerns, you won't not be disappointed.

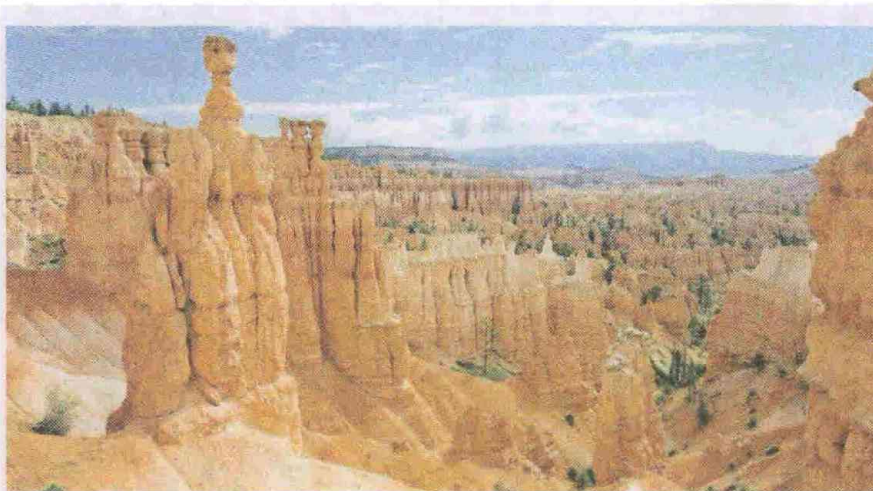


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Canyonlands National Park and, top, Monument Valley: Utah offers some of the most stunning landscapes in North America



Clockwise from top: Bryce Canyon, the Arches National Park, and Beezey, a working cowboy

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## Getting there

**Getting there:** fly Aer Lingus to Chicago and connect to Salt Lake City or Las Vegas (for easy access to Zion and Bryce parks) with Delta, United, AA, US Airways or Northwest. Bags cannot be checked all the way and Delta charges \$15 per piece of check-in luggage. Alternatively, fly through London to Las Vegas for easy access to Zion and Bryce parks.

**What to bring:** hiking shoes, warm clothes,

sun cream, plenty of t-shirts, water bottles. Also make sure to bring a decent digital camera with a minimum 4GB memory card (to hold more than 1,000 high resolution pictures).

**Useful websites:** [www.utah.travel](http://www.utah.travel) (Utah tourist office with links to activities, accommodation and transportation); [www.aerlingus.ie](http://www.aerlingus.ie); [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) (US national parks service)